Reading

Before reading any text, read the table of contents, read the preface and thumb through the entire book.

To read texts with headings and subheadings:

1. Place an index card at the end of the chapter. The card provides a reasonable goal and you will maintain your reading rate as you approach it.

2. Read the introduction before the first heading and then read all of the headings and subheadings throughout the chapter. Turn the major headings into questions and number them. Your goals are to construct a mental outline of the chapter and to provide a focus for your reading. Also look at all of the graphics. Then read the summary before you read the chapter so that you will recognize the main ideas in the chapter when you come to them.

3. Return to the beginning of the chapter, read the first question, and then underline the answer as you read. Use the subheadings to identify the parts of your answer. Reduce the answer to a number (such as "3 factors") or a mnemonic device (such as "jel" for the judicial, executive and legislative branches of the government) and write this aid to memory under the heading. Repeat this process throughout the chapter.

4. Return to the beginning of the chapter again, read the first question while you cover the text with a piece of paper, and recite the answer out loud or write a brief outline of it. Repeat this process for each question. (This step should be done each time that you read a chapter but, realistically, students often do not have time for it. However, if you have followed steps #1-#3 and do step #4 several times to prepare for an exam, your exam preparation will be much more effective.)

To read texts without headings and subheadings:

1. The goals of this method are the same as those for texts with headings but the process differs somewhat. Placing an index card at the end of the chapter is still the first step, however.

2. Read the first paragraph of the chapter. Using the eraser end of a pencil to help you track, read the first few words of each paragraph until you identify the topic (a noun phrase) of the paragraph (such as "Various methods for reading textbooks exist but..."). Repeat this process for every paragraph in the chapter. Read the last paragraph.

3. With this outline in mind, read the chapter and underline main ideas.
4. On the index card, write the major questions that this chapter answers and the "reduced" answer (again, a number or mnemonic) to each question. Use this card for the review process.

Strategies for Underlining:

1. Use a red or green pen instead of a highlighter. Highlighters usually lead to less precise underlining and cannot be used to make graphic marks in the text.

2. Underline key words and phrases, not whole sentences. Nouns, verbs and adjectives are the high content words to look for.

3. Use punctuation to help you in organizing the material. (For example, put an exclamation point after a major point that you have underlined.)

4. Circle words that signal a major change in the thoughts of the paragraph (such as "however" or "on the other hand").

5. Write key words (such as an important date or the name of a major theorist) in the margin. Remember that quality, not quantity, is the key to good underlining. If you underline too much information, you will have to consolidate it all night before a test when you may be feeling overwhelmed. Being selective in the first place can save a lot of time and reduce anxiety.

Improving Reading Rate:

1. Be aware that establishing a purpose for reading and careful previewing will greatly improve your reading rate as well as your reading comprehension because you develop a mental framework into which the details of your reading can fit.

2. Learn to read in phrases rather than word by word. Pay particular attention to the nouns, verbs and adjectives in these phrases. They are the high content words; the rest of what you read can be skimmed (or even skipped).

3. Look for signal words and phrases. For example, "in addition" and "moreover" suggest that you can read faster and "in conclusion" suggests that you should read slowly because an important summation is coming up.

4. Being conscious of time will help you read faster. Note the time when you start, set a reasonable time for completion, and place an index card at the end of the section you plan to read so that you will have a visible goal.

5. Remember to use, when appropriate, some speed reading strategies. Use a pacer such as a pencil or index card to push you faster down a page, train your eyes to zig zag down the middle of a page rather than reading line by line, and focus high on a line to get the most comprehension.